***Horace's Compromise*** Sizer Houghton-Mifflin, NYC. 1984

From Wikki

*Horace's Compromise* consists of Sizer's reflection on a five-year *Study of High Schools* in which a team of investigators toured [high schools](http://www.ask.com/wiki/High_school?qsrc=3044) of various kinds (differing demographic composition, rural and urban, public, private, and parochial), interviewed [teachers](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Teacher?qsrc=3044), [students](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Students?qsrc=3044), and [administrators](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Academic_administration?qsrc=3044), and spent considerable time observing [classrooms](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Classroom?qsrc=3044) and, especially, following students through their daily routines.

Sizer launches an attack on several of the ubiquitous features of an American high school, such as the standard 50-minute classroom block used in scheduling, which Sizer claimed limited the depth of teaching and learning, particularly when one took into account the time it took to get students into and out of their chairs and deal with administrative chores like attendance-taking and announcements, particularly announcements via [PA](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Public_address?qsrc=3044). Sizer also objects strongly to the extensive system of [electives](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Secondary_education_in_the_United_States?qsrc=3044#Electives), wherein students select from several optional courses of widely varying kind (e.g., photography, foreign languages, art, etc.) which potentially distract from the core curriculum and lead to breadth over depth. Sizer was also skeptical of [sports](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Sports?qsrc=3044), which occupy a position of high importance in the life of high schools.

Most central to his critique, however, were practices of teaching and learning. Like [John Dewey](http://www.ask.com/wiki/John_Dewey?qsrc=3044) (Sizer is an avowed Deweyan). **Sizer insisted that education must be** [**dialogical**](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Dialogue?qsrc=3044)**, characterized by give-and-take interaction between teacher and student, rather than unidirectional lecturing. (Sizer primarily emphasized the teacher-student dialogical pairing, though he also admired lively whole-classroom and small-group discussion.) At its best, Sizer suggested that teaching should be thought of as coaching, an analogy to the work of a** [**coach**](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Coach_(sport)?qsrc=3044) **"coaching" athletes.** Sizer's preferred teaching style involves a student submitting writing and then revising and re-revising in response to the critical feedback of the teacher.

But this, and, in Sizer's eyes, any good [pedagogy](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Pedagogy?qsrc=3044) will be difficult, particularly in the nonsupportive environment of the modern bureaucratized high school. So, instead, disengaged students and burnt-out teachers make an unspoken agreement (the eponymous compromise) to demand the least amount of work possible from the other while still fulfilling their basic responsibilities. "It's good enough" is the motto of this compromising education.

Sizer conveys all this in a dual form, alternating descriptions of his experiences at schools with fictional summaries and archetypal characters (producing an effect vaguely reminiscent of [*The Grapes of Wrath*](http://www.ask.com/wiki/The_Grapes_of_Wrath?qsrc=3044)). "Horace" is Sizer's [archetype](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Archetype?qsrc=3044) teacher, qualified, capable, and committed, but dehumanized by his working conditions and willing to make the compromise, though painfully conscious of the cost in authenticity. Sizer concludes on a half-optimistic note of rekindling Horace's passion and revolutionary zeal and setting him out on the reformist task, the consequences of which are picked up in Sizer's later books, *Horace's School* (which applies the method of *Horace's Compromise* to Sizer's own CES schools, then relatively new on the scene) and *Horace's Hope.* (which reflects much more broadly on the condition of American education from around the time Sizer's retirement from large-scale reform work.)

**The Common Principles**

The Coalition was founded on nine "Common Principles" that were intended to codify Sizer's insights from *Horace's Compromise* and the views and beliefs of others in the organization. These original principles were:

1. Learning to use one's mind well
2. Less is More, depth over coverage
3. Goals apply to all students
4. Personalization
5. Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach
6. Demonstration of mastery
7. A tone of decency and trust
8. Commitment to the entire school
9. Resources dedicated to teaching and learning
10. Democracy and equity (this principle was added later, in the mid-nineties)

This was intended to make explicit the Coalition's views on race, class, and gender equality and democratic governance of schools. It is relatively unclear how wide or deep the adoption of the tenth principle is, particularly as regards "democracy", as the sorts of evaluations CES schools are likely to undergo are more oriented towards pedagogy and student performance, and many of the schools that are members of CES, especially those with partial affiliation, may not have had to demonstrate this younger principle rigorously.